Chapter 5

I’m sick of being different. The relationship between gender dissimilarity, work group inclusion, and absenteeism

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CHAPTER 5

Abstract

In the present research we investigated how and when gender dissimilarity relates to two highly important individual work outcomes: social inclusion and absenteeism. We administered a questionnaire among 397 employees from a university of applied sciences and combined these survey data with data from the organization’s personnel administration. We found that gender dissimilarity was negatively related to the extent to which employees perceived to be included in their work group. In addition, we found that this negative effect was more pronounced when the group was perceived to not be open towards and appreciative of gender differences (i.e., to have a negative diversity climate). Finally, we found evidence for a conditional indirect effect of gender dissimilarity on absenteeism through inclusion. That is, being different from other group members in terms of gender was associated with higher absenteeism through lower levels of perceived inclusion, but only when the group was perceived to have a negative diversity climate. Together, the present research demonstrates that sometimes being different is associated with more absences and underlines the importance of establishing a positive climate for gender diversity.
Having a gender diverse workforce is important to organizations in many respects. Gender diversity can improve internal work processes, may enlarge the organization’s external network, and can improve the moral image of the organization (Jackson & Joshi, 2011; Phillips, Kim-Jun, & Shim, 2011). Yet, while gender diversity may offer organizations a competitive advantage, research suggests that individual employees sometimes struggle with being different from their colleagues in terms of gender, as manifested in lower levels of affective and productive work outcomes (Guillaume et al., 2012; Tsui & Gutek, 1999). Accordingly, there is a strong need for research that clarifies under which conditions the problems associated with gender differences can be avoided. The present research addressed this need by considering how gender diversity relates to two highly important work outcomes: social inclusion and absenteeism.

Research attempting to understand how diversity affects work-related outcomes can be divided into two distinct categories that differ in their conceptualization of diversity (Guillaume et al., 2012). In the compositional approach, diversity is seen as the distribution of differences among the members of a unit (e.g., a work group). Hence, this approach takes a group perspective by considering diversity to be a group characteristic that may explain group level outcomes (Harrison & Klein, 2007). It attempts to answer questions such as: are mixed gender work groups more creative than same gender work groups? While this approach has generated important insights as to how diverse work groups can be effectively managed and structured, it is less suited to study how individual group members are affected by diversity. The implicit assumption in the compositional approach is that diversity affects all group members in the same way.

In contrast, the relational approach conceptualizes diversity as dissimilarity: the extent to which an individual is different from other group members in terms of a specific attribute (e.g., gender; Tsui et al., 1992). Thus, this approach assumes an individual-within-the-group perspective by considering diversity to be an individual characteristic that may explain individual level outcomes. It attempts to answer questions such as: does a male employee feel more included in his work group when a larger share of the other group members is also male? Thus, the main premise of the relational approach is that diversity affects group members differently depending on how dissimilar they are within the group.

In the present research we are particularly interested in how diversity affects individual work-related outcomes. Accordingly, we choose to adopt a relational approach to diversity. In doing so, our work offers a valuable contribution to existing diversity research, considering that the vast majority of diversity studies has taken a
compositional approach (for a review, see Guillaume et al., 2012). Furthermore, unlike previous research that has mostly focused on how dissimilarity affects the extent to which individuals psychologically connect to their work group, we consider how being different affects the extent to which the group is perceived to include the individual (cf. Jansen, Otten, Van der Zee, & Jans, 2014). In addition, by investigating how perceived inclusion, in turn, relates to the number of days that people are absent from work, we are able to determine how dissimilarity is related to an objectively assessed work outcome. Finally, we provide a deeper understanding of when being dissimilar is most consequential. In particular, we posit that the extent to which the group is perceived to be open towards and appreciative of gender differences (i.e., has a positive diversity climate; Harquail & Cox, 1993) is a key contingency factor of the dissimilarity-outcomes relationship. Our conceptual model is depicted in Figure 5.1.

![Figure 5.1 Conceptual Model](image)

### Gender Dissimilarity and Inclusion

Gender dissimilarity in work groups has been defined as the difference between a focal group member and his or her peers with respect to gender (Guillaume et al., 2012). Accordingly, gender dissimilarity reflects how prototypical a group member is within a group in terms of his or her gender (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1998). This relative position is deemed to have important consequences for the individual, with the few existing studies focusing on how being dissimilar affects the extent to which an individual psychologically connects to the group (Guillaume et al., 2012).

Based on self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987) and social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), researchers have hypothesized that dissimilarity is negatively related to individuals’ attachment to the group. According to SCT, people use observable similarities and differences (such as gender) to categorize themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups. SCT further suggests that people who are dissimilar are more prone to become aware of their demographic group membership (i.e., their gender). As a result, they are more likely to define
themselves in terms of their demographic group membership, rather than in terms of their work group membership. SIT extends this reasoning by positing that in order to enhance and maintain a positive social identity, people like and trust in-group members more than out-group members. Together, this implies that dissimilar individuals may feel less attached to other group members. This prediction has found empirical support in a number of studies (e.g., Chattopadhyay et al., 2004; Guillaume et al., 2012; Tsui et al., 1992).

Importantly, while we concur with the above reasoning, we hold that these arguments do not only imply that dissimilar individuals may refrain from attaching themselves to the group, but also that the group may be perceived as less willing to include the individual. In this regard, inclusion refers to the extent to which an individual perceives to be an accepted group member that is allowed to be him- or herself within the group (Jansen et al., 2014). Because being dissimilar (i.e., being in the minority) increases one’s visibility within the group, group members belonging to the demographic majority may see and treat dissimilar individuals as peripheral group members (Mullen, Chapman, & Peaugh, 1989). Also, similar to minorities, majority group members are motivated to maintain and enhance a positive social identity. As a result, they may develop a relatively less positive stance towards minority members. Together, these arguments lead us to expect an inverse relationship between gender dissimilarity and the extent to which an individual perceives to be included in his or her work group. Accordingly, our first hypothesis is:

**Hypothesis 1**: Gender dissimilarity is negatively related to perceived inclusion.

**The Moderating Effect of Diversity Climate**

So far, the arguments we have put forward suggest that being dissimilar in terms of gender is associated with lower levels of perceived inclusion. However, there is reason to believe that this relationship may be contingent on contextual factors. For example, previous research suggests that the extent to which work group members depend on each other to perform their tasks plays an important role (Guillaume et al., 2012). Specifically, Guillaume and colleagues found that the negative effects of gender dissimilarity on social integration and individual performance were more pronounced in groups characterized by low interdependence than in groups with high interdependence. The rationale behind this is that team interdependence fosters personalized interactions among group members. That is, when people are dependent on each other, they come to see one another as individuals rather than as
representatives of demographic categories, rendering more harmonious subgroup relations (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Brickson, 2000).

However, another viewpoint is that subgroup salience does not necessarily undermine positive relationships among group members. That is, as long as subgroup differences are seen as positive, perceiving one another as group representatives is not harmful for subgroup relations (Hewstone & Brown, 1986). Following this perspective, in the present research we focus on the group’s climate for gender diversity as a potential contingency factor of the dissimilarity-outcomes relationship (cf. Gonzalez & Denisi, 2009). We define diversity climate as the degree to which individuals perceive the group to be open towards and appreciative of differences between men and women (Harquail & Cox, 1993).

We posit that the negative association between gender dissimilarity and perceived inclusion may be especially pronounced if the group is perceived not to be open towards and appreciative of gender differences (i.e., to have a negative diversity climate). In these groups, dissimilarity is seen as a liability, leading majority members to be particularly inclined to display in-group favoritism. Accordingly, in this context, dissimilarity may result in lower levels of perceived inclusion.

In contrast, the negative effect of being dissimilar may be weaker or even disappear if the group is perceived to have a positive diversity climate. In these groups, being dissimilar is not considered to be a hindrance, but is seen as valuable. Accordingly, majority members may be less inclined to have a relative preference for interacting with in-group members. Hence, when a group is perceived to have a positive diversity climate, the negative relationship between gender dissimilarity and perceived inclusion may be weaker.

These predictions have already received some empirical support. For example, it has been found that diversity climate perceptions attenuated the positive effect of gender dissimilarity on turnover intentions (Gonzalez & Denisi, 2009). Further evidence for the moderating effect of diversity climate comes from research conducted in the domain of racial and cultural diversity. Specifically, diversity climate perceptions have been found to moderate the effect of cultural/racial dissimilarity on a range of work-related outcomes, such as organizational commitment and identification (Hofhuis, Van der Zee, & Otten, 2012; McKay et al., 2007; Wolfson, Kraiger, & Finkelstein, 2011), perceived inclusion (Vos et al., under review), and perceived job recognition (Hofhuis et al., 2012). Together, this leads us to our second hypothesis:
Hypothesis 2: The negative relationship between gender dissimilarity and perceived inclusion is moderated by perceived diversity climate, such that it will be stronger for employees who perceive their work group to have a negative diversity climate than for employees who perceive their work group to have a positive diversity climate.

Inclusion and Absenteeism

An important follow-up question is why inclusion in the workplace matters. The significance of social inclusion for both individual employees and their immediate work environment has been well documented in previous research. In particular, perceptions of inclusion have been found to be positively associated with a range of individual (e.g., mood, work satisfaction, and creativity), interpersonal (e.g., trust) and group-level outcomes (conflict, performance, and team learning behavior; Jansen et al., 2014). Also, experimental studies have shown that inclusion (compared with exclusion) improved self-regulation (Baumeister et al., 2005), resulted in lower levels of distress (K. D. Williams & Nida, 2011), and increased pro-social behavior (Twenge et al., 2007).

These findings suggest that inclusion may also be related to another highly relevant work-related outcome, which is the focus of the present research: absenteeism. Absenteeism, defined as the number of days that people are absent from work, has important consequences for both individual employees and organizations. For individuals, absenteeism may have short term effects such as reduced performance, stress, and an increased workload when returning to work. In the long run, absenteeism may reduce individuals’ chances for promotion and can even be a precursor for turnover. For organizations, absenteeism usually causes capacity problems and reduces group performance (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998). But above all, employee absences are very costly. In fact, estimates of the average cost per employee per missed day vary from 200 USD to 700 USD (Anderson, 2005; Armes, 2005).

Although researchers have not specifically focused on inclusion as a predictor of absenteeism, there is some indirect evidence for such a link. First, as already mentioned, inclusion has been found to be positively associated with psychological well-being (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2005; K. D. Williams & Nida, 2011). We predict that such an improved mental state may cause employees to be less often sick and thereby reduce their absences from work. Second, scholars have argued that people who feel more included in their group are also more motivated to contribute to their
group (e.g., Ellemers & Jetten, 2013). We may expect that, because of this increased motivation, employees who strongly feel included are more likely to show up for work. In line with these predictions, there is evidence that factors similar to perceived inclusion, such as the perceived affective tone and support of the group, result in fewer employee absences (George, 1990; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Together, this leads us to our third hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3:** The extent to which employees perceive to be included in their group is negatively related to the number of days they are absent.

Capturing our full research model (see Figure 5.1), the final relationship we focus on is that between gender dissimilarity and absenteeism. Following from our first three hypotheses, and building on research that considers inclusion to be a process variable that links organizational features to work-related outcomes (Vos et al., under review), we hypothesize a conditional indirect effect of gender dissimilarity on absenteeism. That is, we predict that the indirect relationship between gender dissimilarity and absenteeism through perceived inclusion will depend on how positive employees perceive their work group’s diversity climate. More precisely, our reasoning implies the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4:** The indirect effect of gender dissimilarity on absenteeism through perceived inclusion is stronger for people who perceive their work group to have a negative diversity climate than for employees who perceive their work group to have a positive diversity climate.

**Gender Differences**

The last question we address is whether our hypothesized relationships are different for men and women. Previous research on this matter appears to be quite inconsistent. Some research showed that dissimilarity effects may be stronger for women than for men (e.g., Gonzalez & Denisi, 2009), but there is also evidence that being dissimilar is more consequential for men than for women (e.g., Tsui et al., 1992). Thus, instead of formulating an explicit hypothesis about the moderating effect of gender, in the present research we will explore whether our hypothesized relationships differ between men and women.
Method

Participants

Respondents were 397 employees from a university of applied sciences located in the Netherlands. Their mean age was 45.05 years ($SD = 10.77$ years) and 61% of all participants were female. The sample was selected such that all respondents had no leadership roles and were part of a larger work group. Participants were part of either the supporting staff ($n = 225$) or educational staff ($n = 172$). All respondents completed an online questionnaire about organizational diversity, in which we asked them both personal questions and questions about their group of direct colleagues. In the remainder, we refer to this group as “work group.” We identified 132 work groups. Using data from the personnel administration, we found that the average size of these work groups was about 10 people and ranged from 3 to 20 people. This implies that, on average, for each work group we analyzed, we obtained the data of 30% of all group members. Respondents indicated to be part of their work group for 5.61 years on average ($SD = 5.48$ years).

Measures

Gender dissimilarity. As recommended by Harrison and Klein (2007) we operationalized gender dissimilarity by calculating the Euclidean distance between each respondent and his or her other group members. Specifically, for each individual group member the Euclidean distance was calculated by dividing the number of other group members with a different gender by group size and then taking the square root of this fraction (Tsui et al., 1992). To illustrate, consider a work group of three male and two female members. For the men in this group, the Euclidean distance equals $\sqrt{2/5} = .63$. For the women, the Euclidean distance equals $\sqrt{3/5} = .77$. We obtained the necessary information about group size and the gender of all group members from the personnel administration.

Perceived inclusion. The extent to which employees perceived to be included within their work group was measured with eight items from the original 16-item Perceived Group Inclusion Scale (Jansen et al., 2014). Example items include “My work group gives me the feeling that I belong” and “My work group allows me

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23 We decided not to use the complete original scale for two reasons. First, the items of the original scale are to a high degree homogenously formulated. In our view, this justifies the use of an abbreviated version of the scale. Second, due to practical restrictions (i.e., we were instructed by the organization to keep the average completion time of the questionnaire below the 10 minute mark), we were limited in the number of items that we could present to the respondents. Provided that, in the validation article of the original scale (Jansen et al., 2014), all items were shown to highly load on their intended factors (all factor loadings exceeded .70), we chose to randomly pick out 4 items of each subscale of the perceived group inclusion scale (belonging and authenticity).
to be who I am” (α = .90). All items were assessed using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Diversity climate. Perceived diversity climate was assessed with four items based on Harquail and Cox (1993). We slightly adapted the wording of the original items. That is, rather than measuring the perceived work group stance towards differences in general, as the original items do, we rephrased the items to measure the perceived openness towards and appreciation of gender differences in particular. An example item of the scale we used is: “In my work group differences between men and women are seen as positive” (α = .83). Again, answer categories ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Absenteeism. The number of days that people were absent was obtained from the organization’s personnel administration.24 Because absence data tend to be highly positively skewed, we performed a square-root transformation. This type of transformation helps to reduce the impact of skew and outliers. Consistent with previous research on absenteeism (Avery, McKay, Wilson, & Tonidandel, 2007) and as recommended by statisticians (J. Cohen et al., 2003; Howell, 1992; Johns, 1994), we used the following formula to perform the transformation: Absenteeism\textsubscript{transformed} = √(Days缺席) + √(Days缺席 + 1).

Control variables. We included the control variables age, gender, and staff type (support or educational). Gender was not only included to control for its potential relationship with our study variables, but also to be able to assess whether our hypothesized relationships differed for men and women.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of the study variables and their intercorrelations are displayed in Table 5.1. Note that, in line with our first hypothesis, gender dissimilarity was negatively related to perceived inclusion, r = -.11, p = .03. Consistent with hypothesis 3, perceived inclusion was negatively correlated with absenteeism, r = -.12, p = .02. Also notable, gender was significantly related to gender dissimilarity (r = .21, p < .01), indicating that male employees were on average more dissimilar than female

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24 At the time of our data collection, the organization’s administration system was organized such that absenteeism data was available per calendar year (i.e., the number of days that employees were absent from January 1st to December 31st). We administered the questionnaire in early June of 2012 and used the absence data for the calendar year 2012. In doing so, we made sure that we only used the data of people who were in the same work group as they were in the beginning of the year (and therefore also at the time of our questionnaire). This way, we ruled out the possibility that people had switched groups.
employees. This finding is a reflection of the organization’s demographics, in which the majority of employees (54%) was female. In addition, gender was significantly correlated with absenteeism \( (r = -19, p < .01) \), indicating that on average men were less absent than women. This is consistent with findings from previous research (e.g., Harrison & Martocchio, 1998). Similarly, respondents that were part of the supporting staff appeared to be more often absent than those in the educational staff \( (r = -14, p < .01) \). Finally, age was not significantly related to any of our other main variables and was therefore excluded from further analysis.

**Table 5.1** Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender dissimilarity</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Perceived inclusion</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Perc. diversity climate</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>-.09†</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Absenteeism</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>.00ns</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.09†</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Age</td>
<td>45.05</td>
<td>10.77</td>
<td>-.03ns</td>
<td>.01ns</td>
<td>.00ns</td>
<td>.04ns</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Gendera</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>-.02ns</td>
<td>.04ns</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Staff typeb</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.09†</td>
<td>.01ns</td>
<td>.02ns</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
<td>.02ns</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* \( *p < .05; **p < .01. \)

†\( p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01. \)

**Preliminary Analyses**

Before testing our hypotheses, we conducted two preliminary analyses. First, we assessed whether our measures could be empirically distinguished. Second, because our data were nested (i.e., employees were part of work groups), we tested whether it was appropriate to adopt a multilevel analytic strategy.

**Confirmatory factor analyses.** We evaluated the measures’ factor structure with confirmatory factor analyses (CFA’s). Here, we specifically focused on the study variables that were assessed with Likert-type questionnaire items (i.e., perceived inclusion and perceived diversity climate). First, we estimated a model in which all items loaded on one factor, and found that this model fitted the data poorly, \( \chi^2/df = 19.68, \text{RMSEA} = .22, \text{NNFI} = .57, \text{CFI} = .65. \) Second, we estimated a two-factor model, distinguishing between perceived inclusion and perceived diversity climate. This model reached acceptable fit, \( \chi^2/df = 2.71, \text{RMSEA} = .07, \text{NNFI} = .96, \text{CFI} = .97. \) All items loaded significantly on their respective factors (standardized factor loadings > .40). Moreover, this model appeared to be a significant improvement over the one-factor model, \( \Delta \chi^2 = 930.39, p < .01. \)
Intraclass correlation analysis. We assessed the appropriateness of a multi-level analysis by calculating the intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC) for our mediator, moderator, and dependent variable (absenteeism, perceived diversity climate, and perceived inclusion). The ICC is defined as the proportion of between-group variance relative to the total amount of variance (Field, 2005). The ICC’s for absenteeism, perceived diversity climate, and perceived inclusion were respectively .044, .12, and .015. This indicates that about 4.4% of the variation in scores on absenteeism, 12% of the variation in perceived diversity climate, and 1.5% of the variance in inclusion responses were situated at the level of the work group, with the remaining variation located at the individual level. In addition, we tested whether these between-group variance components were significant. This was not the case for absenteeism and perceived inclusion ($p$’s > .05). Yet, we did find that the between-group variance component of perceived diversity climate was significant ($p < .01$), suggesting that a multi-level analysis was necessary.

Main Analyses

We tested all of our hypotheses by estimating a multi-level random intercept model in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2007). This allowed us to control for the nested structure of our data. Consistent with our operationalization, all variables were specified as individual level (level 1) variables. We used a bootstrapping procedure (1000 samples) to test the significance of the conditional indirect effect of gender dissimilarity on absenteeism through inclusion. Dummy codes were used for gender (0 = female, 1 = male) and staff type (0 = support, 1 = educational). In addition, the Euclidean distances and perceived diversity climate scores were standardized, and their interaction term was construed based on these standardized scores (cf. J. Cohen et al., 2003). Table 5.2 shows the results.

Our hypothesized model fitted the data well, $\chi^2/df = .58$, RMSEA = .00, CFI = 1.00. Consistent with hypothesis 1, gender dissimilarity was negatively related to perceived inclusion, although this main effect was only marginally significant, $b = -.06$, $t(260) = -1.81$, $p = .07$. Confirming hypothesis 2, this relationship was moderated by perceived diversity climate, $b = .07$, $t(260) = 2.28$, $p = .02$. An inspection of the simple slopes (see Figure 5.2) revealed that for group members who perceived their work group to have a negative diversity climate, gender dissimilarity was negatively related to perceived inclusion, $b = -.12$, $t(260) = -2.77$, $p < .01$. For group members who perceived their work group to have a positive diversity climate, gender dissimilarity was unrelated to the extent to which they perceived to be included, $b = .01$, $t(260) = .29$, $p = .77$. There also appeared to be a positive main effect of perceived diversity climate on perceived inclusion, $b = .17$, $t(260) = 5.63$, $p < .01$. 

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Table 5.2 Results of Multilevel Regression Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Perc. inclusion (mediator)</th>
<th>Absenteeism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (0 = female; 1 = male)</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff type (0 = support; 1 = education)</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender dissimilarity</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived diversity climate</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender diss. x Perc. diversity climate</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceived inclusion | - .98* | .43 | -2.30* |

Overall model statistics

| Level 1 variance | 0.34 | 27.41 |
| Level 2 variance | 0.01 | 0.26 |
| -2log-likelihood | 702.19 | 2442.94 |

Note. Full maximum likelihood estimation was used (n = 397 individuals from 132 work groups). The table displays unstandardized regression weights.

†p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01.

Figure 5.2 Perceived Inclusion as a Function of Gender Dissimilarity and Perceived Diversity Climate (adjusted means are displayed)

Turning to the right pane of Table 5.2, we found that perceived inclusion was negatively related to absenteeism, $b = -.98$, $t(260) = -2.30$, $p = .02$. This confirms hypothesis 3. Because absenteeism was a transformed variable in our model we performed an additional analysis to demonstrate how perceptions of inclusion were related to the actual number of days that people were absent (i.e., the untransformed
variable). For each point in the range of the inclusion scale (1-5), we calculated the corresponding number of (untransformed) absence days (assuming all other variables were kept constant) and plotted this in Figure 5.3.

![Figure 5.3 Days Absent (untransformed) as a Function of Perceived Inclusion](image)

In addition, the bootstrapping results indicated the presence of a conditional indirect effect, supporting hypothesis 4. That is, for people experiencing a negative diversity climate, gender dissimilarity was positively related to absenteeism through lower levels of perceived inclusion, $\rho = .12$, 95% CI [.02, .31]. For people experiencing a positive diversity climate, the indirect effect of gender dissimilarity on absenteeism through inclusion was not significant, $\rho = -.01$, 95% CI [-.11, .07].

Finally, to test whether our estimated effects differed for men and women, we performed a multi-group analysis on our proposed model (Vandenberg, 2002). This is a two-step procedure. First, effect sizes are estimated separately for men and women. Second, the differences between these estimates are tested for statistical significance. The results (see Table 5.3) indicated that all of the estimated effects were equivalent for men and women.

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25 We also estimated an alternative model to check for the presence of feedback effects. Specifically, we assessed whether a model in which inclusion and absenteeism were switched in their position provided a better fit to the data than our hypothesized model. The results indicated that this alternative model yielded a significantly worse fit to our data than our hypothesized model, $\Delta \chi^2 = 37.82$, $p < .01$. In addition, the bootstrapping results indicated that, this time, there was no conditional indirect effect. That is, regardless of the level of perceived diversity climate, gender dissimilarity was not related to inclusion through absenteeism. These results suggest that feedback effects did not play a substantial role in our model.
I'M SICK OF BEING DIFFERENT

Table 5.3 Regression Coefficients for Men (n = 157) and Women (n = 240) separately

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Z-difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender dissimilarity → Inclusion</td>
<td>-0.07 .06</td>
<td>-0.05 .04</td>
<td>.23ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived diversity climate → Inclusion</td>
<td>0.19 .06</td>
<td>0.16 .04</td>
<td>-.37ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender diss. x Perc. div. climate → Inclusion</td>
<td>0.08 .05</td>
<td>0.05 .04</td>
<td>-.43ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender dissimilarity → Absenteeism</td>
<td>0.22 .28</td>
<td>0.38 .41</td>
<td>.32ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion → Absenteeism</td>
<td>-1.16 .37</td>
<td>-0.83 .70</td>
<td>.41ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Due to increased labor market participation of women, organizations are becoming progressively gender diverse (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). While having both men and women represented in the organization may offer important benefits, research indicates that individual employees may struggle with being different from others (Pfeffer, 1983; Tsui & Gutek, 1999). The present study aimed to provide further insight into how and under which conditions being different from others in terms of gender may not be problematic.

Consistent with predictions derived from self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) we found that gender dissimilarity was negatively related to the extent to which employees perceived to be included in their work group. In addition, we found that this negative effect was more pronounced when the group was perceived not to be open towards and appreciative of gender differences (i.e., to have a negative diversity climate). Finally, we found evidence for a conditional indirect effect of gender dissimilarity on absenteeism through inclusion. That is, being different from other group members in terms of gender was associated with higher absenteeism through lower levels of perceived inclusion, but only when the group was perceived to have a negative diversity climate.

Implications

The present work extends previous research on gender diversity in a number of ways. First, rather than assuming the more prevalent compositional approach we adopted a relational approach to diversity. A major advantage of the relational approach, in comparison to the compositional approach, is that it acknowledges that diversity may impact individuals differently depending on the extent to which they are different from other group members (Guillaume et al., 2012; Tsui & Gutek, 1999). Accordingly, our study was specifically equipped to provide further insight into how
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gender diversity is related to individual work outcomes, such as inclusion and absenteeism.

In addition, whereas existing dissimilarity studies have almost exclusively focused on how dissimilarity affects the extent to which the individual psychologically connects to the group (Guillaume et al., 2012) the current research suggests that dissimilarity may also affect the extent to which the group is perceived to be willing to include the individual. This is an important extension of previous dissimilarity research, as it explicitly focuses on the role that groups play in shaping individual group members’ work experience. Such a focus is likely to improve our understanding of how being dissimilar affects individuals, and seems a promising road for future dissimilarity research.

Another contribution of the present research is that it provides further evidence for the importance of social inclusion at work. Specifically, we demonstrated that perceptions of inclusion are negatively related to the number of days that people are absent from work. As such, we established that perceptions of inclusion not only relate to self-reported outcome measures (as has been demonstrated in previous research; see Jansen et al., 2014), but are also associated with an objectively assessed work outcome.

Finally, the present study offers further insights into under which conditions the negative effects of dissimilarity within work groups may be attenuated. Specifically, our results suggest that the perception of a positive diversity climate might help to overcome the potential negative effects of being dissimilar. This finding not only advances dissimilarity research, but also may inform organizations as to how to reduce employee absences.

**Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research**

A notable strength of the present research concerns our research design. We were able to combine responses to our questionnaire with data from the personnel administration. Such a multiple source dataset greatly reduces the likelihood of common method variance, allowing for drawing more valid conclusions about the relationships between our measures (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

In addition, having access to the organization’s personnel administration allowed us to operationalize dissimilarity in an objective and precise manner. Whereas in other studies (e.g., Hofhuis et al., 2012; Vos et al., under review) a dichotomous, and arguably rather unsophisticated, distinction is made between majority and minority members (or between racial groups; e.g., McKay et al., 2007; Wolfson et al., 2011), in the present research we operationalized dissimilarity in a more precise manner by calculating for each respondent how much he or she is different from his
or her direct colleagues in terms of gender. We consider this an important adaptation, as this allowed for a more refined test of our hypothesized relationships.

While the multi-source nature of our data is a considerable strength, at the same time one may posit that our data were cross-sectional, inhibiting our ability to draw conclusions regarding the causality of the relations examined. For example, whether our respondents were more absent and as a result felt less included in their work group, or whether lower levels of perceived inclusion resulted in more absences cannot be determined with our data. As such, we believe that future research may elaborate on our findings by adopting a longitudinal or experimental research design.

Furthermore, while the results of our multigroup analysis indicated that all of the estimated effects were equivalent for men and women, they also revealed that most regression weights for men and women separately were not significant. This could be due to a loss in statistical power. Accordingly, we think that future research may more adequately test the separate effects for men and women by sampling a larger number of respondents.

In addition, future studies may further clarify under which conditions dissimilarity effects may be stronger for men or women. As already hinted at earlier, previous research is inconsistent as to whether dissimilarity effects are stronger for men than for women. Interestingly, both the prediction that men are more affected by dissimilarity than women and the opposite prediction that women are more affected by being dissimilar than men depart from the same assumption: men are a higher status group than women. Researchers predicting that dissimilarity is more consequential for men than for women continue to posit that members of high status groups may feel more threatened to lose their dominant position when they are more dissimilar (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2004; Tsui et al., 1992). In contrast, researchers predicting that dissimilarity has a stronger impact on women than men continue the argument by positing that members of low status groups, when placed in a numerical minority, are subject to higher visibility, scrutiny, and performance standards than members of high status groups (Roth, 2004). As already mentioned, in the present research we did not find any gender differences in our hypothesized relationships. Considering the arguments above, this could be because, in our specific sample, there were no perceived status differences between men and women. Yet another explanation is that the two processes described above may have operated at the same time. That is, while for men dissimilarity may have been positively associated with perceived levels of threat, for women being more dissimilar could have been accompanied with increased concern for how one is evaluated. Thus, future dissimilarity research may further clarify under which conditions being dissimilar will
be more consequential for either men or women by measuring the extent to which men and women are perceived to differ in status, and by simultaneously considering how dissimilarity is related to threat and concern for evaluations by others.

Related to this, dissimilarity research may be further refined by taking into account the moderating role of occupational demography. In this respect, research assuming a compositional approach to diversity has found that occupational gender composition moderated the negative effect of team gender diversity on performance, such that the effect was weaker in gender-balanced occupations (Joshi & Roh, 2009). A similar effect may be expected with regard to gender dissimilarity. That is, dissimilarity may have a stronger impact on employees in professions that are less gender-balanced. Applying this prediction to the present research, we can expect that the dissimilarity effects we found would have been even stronger if we had focused on an organization that operates in a less gender-balanced sector than the specific one we considered (i.e., higher education). In addition, whereas in male-dominated occupations one might expect that being different from others in terms of gender is especially consequential for women, in female-dominated occupations gender dissimilarity is likely to have the strongest effects for men. Future research may provide an adequate test of these predictions by systematically sampling respondents from different occupational settings.

**Concluding Remarks**

Together, the present research substantially enhances our understanding of how individual employees are affected by gender diversity. It demonstrates that being different sometimes implies being more absent and highlights that establishing a positive diversity climate is essential to make gender diversity beneficial to organizations and their employees.